

Married Life, Third Year

By MABEL HERBERT URNA

"Now be there promptly—Pennsylvania station at ten minutes of five. Better meet right by the ticket window. Now don't fool around and be late," and Warren hurried off.

They were going out to Trenton to dine with the Merwins, and would return on the 10:30 train. Helen hastened through her morning household duties, and then began looking over her clothes.

To dress for a dinner and at the same time to look properly gown for the train, is always difficult. She had planned to wear her gray chiffon

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under a long cloak. But last night it turned piercingly cold. Flakes of snow were in the air and the wind was cutting.

It was much too cold for the chiffon. The only thing that seemed suitable was her mauve-colored velvet, which needed cleaning badly. She examined it critically and decided to dip it in gasoline.

Helen kept a gallon can just for gasoline and now she sent Maggie to the paint store to have it refilled. She emptied the whole gallon in a big dishpan, placed the pan in the wash-tub as the safest place in case of accident and dipped in the velvet dress.

With rubber gloves to protect her hands, she swished the dress about, finally shook it out and hung it dripping on the shower ring over the tub. By eleven o'clock her dress had dried, looking as though it has come from the cleaners.

But the Smell.

"Didn't it clean well?" she demanded of Maggie, who was now washing up the bathroom.

"It certainly did, ma'am—like new. But it smells right strong. You reckon that'll get out before you start?"

"I'll hang it in my room on the chandelier and open the windows."

But the velvet was thick and held the odor. Every little while Helen would go in and sniff over it anxiously. A gale of cold air was blowing through, but the gasoline was still distressingly strong. She had cleaned gowns before and worn them the same evening, but they had been of chiffon or thin silk and the smell had soon blown out.

By four o'clock Helen was in despair. The odor seemed almost as strong as ever, yet there was nothing else she could wear.

"Why, you're not going to wear this dress, are you, ma'am?" exclaimed Maggie, when she called her to look it up.

"I'll have to," desperately. "I have not another thing. But I'll keep my coat off and maybe it'll evaporate before I get there."

Although it was now freezing cold Helen walked to the car, carrying her coat. When she reached the station, Warren was not there. He had no faith in her promptness and always told her at least ten minutes ahead of time.

At four minutes of five she saw him running down the steps. He waved to her and hurried over to get the tickets.

"Here, this way! We've only three minutes. What are you carrying that coat for? Put it on! Don't you know it's cold?"

"Yes, dear, but I cleaned this in gasoline," Helen explained breathlessly, as he rushed her out of the gate and down the platform, "and I want it

to evaporate. Can't you notice its odor?"

"Phew! Should say I could. Smells like a garage."

Sits By the Window.

"Let me sit by the window," she suggested, when they got on the train. "Maybe I can have it open and blow some of this out."

"Not on a day like this. You're not going to freeze everybody else, just because you'd no more sense than to wear a smelt-up dress."

In the warm, close car, the odor was more noticeable than ever.

"Dear, do you suppose it won't be out? Do you suppose they'll notice it when I get there?"

"Notice it! Strong enough to knock you down! Why the deuce did you wear it?"

"It was the only thing I had that was warm enough. And it was so soiled I just had to clean it."

"That's like you. Always having to make over or clean a gown the last minute. Other women have the sense to keep their clothes in order and don't rush off full of pins and bastings and reeking with gasoline."

In a way Warren's criticism was deserved, for Helen had been so busy this winter that she had neglected her clothes, and several times had been forced to hurriedly "fix over" a dress just before she wore it.

"Well, I can't stand this—makes me sick. I'm going back in the smoker."

And Helen was left alone to anguish over her dress and over how she would explain it when she got there.

When they left the train at Trenton Warren motioned to one of the backs drawn up by the station.

"Oh, dear, won't we have time to walk?" pleaded Helen. "If I walk there without my coat surely some of this will blow away."

"Yes, and you'll get the pneumonia."

"I don't care what I get," recklessly, "if only I can air this out."

They started off at a brisk pace, Helen carrying her coat on her arm, holding it well out from her so as not to obstruct the air.

"Anybody'd think you're crazy," growled Warren, "walking without a coat on a night like this."

But Helen trudged shivering on, unhappily conscious that her nose and ears were crimson and that she would look most "unbeautiful."

"Say, you'll be sick," exclaimed Warren at length, touched by her silent endurance. "You'd better put the coat on. Guess they can stand the smell if we can."

"No, really I'm not cold," insisted Helen with chattering teeth, "and we will soon be there now."

"Here we are," as he threw open an iron gate. Shaded lamps gleamed cheerfully from the windows, but Helen's heart sank as they went up the walk. The Merwins were such formal people.

But almost as they entered, Mrs. Merwin, who was usually so staidly self-contained, burst into nervous, hurried apologies.

"Isn't it dreadful? It's all through the house! But we have a new maki and just can't make her keep the kitchen door closed."

Helen could have shrieked with joy as it dawned on her that Mrs. Merwin was apologizing for the odor of cooking, which she now realized was unmistakably strong. Mrs. Merwin went on to explain that their old girl had left yesterday.

"You know it always happens that way," she lamented, "and we just had to put up with this one this evening. I'm sure I don't know what kind of a dinner we'll have—she won't let me go near the kitchen."

Helen could hardly restrain a hysterical laugh of relief and later when her eyes met Warren's, he grinned understandingly.

In the dining room the odor of cooking was stronger than ever and when they sat down to the table Mrs. Merwin renewed her apologies.

"If you'll excuse me," getting up again, "I'll burn some incense. Perhaps that will help."

But after dinner when they went back into the sitting room, Mr. Merwin who was on the couch by Helen, began sniffing the air suspiciously.

"Molly, don't you notice another smell in here? It's gas, isn't it? Do you suppose that girl's left the stove turned on?"

"No, the gas is all off, and I don't notice it out there. It's just in here."

There was a general sniffing now. As Warren saw Helen's growing nervousness and deepening color he tried to change the subject.

Then Merwin got out some cigars. "Here, Curtis, smoke up. Perhaps these 'two for fives' are strong enough to kill the smells around here."

But Mrs. Merwin was of a persistent nature and she kept on sniffing, determined to locate the odor.

At last Helen exclaimed with a nervous laugh:

"Do you suppose it could be this dress? It just came from the cleaners. You know sometimes they do send them home smelling dreadful."

Mrs. Merwin came over and sniffed at the dress, then sank in her chair with an air of relief.

"Yes, I guess that's it. But it smells like gasoline. I didn't know cleaners used gasoline any more."

"Oh, some of them do. At least the one I have does," stammered Helen, panic-stricken. "But I didn't notice it at all when I put it on."

Here Helen glanced towards Warren and saw that he was scowling darkly. He hated to have her to lie. It always made him furious, and she hated herself for it, too. And yet she was always telling some foolish, little lie through sheer, nervous self-consciousness.

Mr. Merwin went with them to the station, so Warren had no chance to roar at her until they were on the train.

"Well, you're a blooming chump," he fumed. "Why on earth couldn't you have sat tight and said nothing?"

"But, dear," almost in tears, "they wouldn't talk of anything else—what could I do?"

"Keep your mouth shut, of course. That green girl smelt up the place with cooking and let you out fine. Then right at the last you had to blurt out that lie about the cleaners. But what's the use?" contemptuously. "You're the limit."

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